

Good Afternoon.

Thank you, Sue, for the very kind introduction. Sue Gens is doing a terrific job at the State Arts Board and I am so pleased she is with us today.

We are at a wonderful St. Paul venue today because of the tremendous hospitality of Richard Hitchler and the SteppingStone Theater. Thank you, Richard - and all the staff - for opening your doors to us and for the wonderful work with young artists that takes place here at SteppingStone.

This is an amazing turnout of artists, representatives of arts organizations, arts patrons, educators, and interested citizens - thank you all for coming.

This town hall meeting is an opportunity to hear from a national arts leader and to hear from a state that is demonstrating national leadership in the arts. After some introductory comments I am going to join you in the audience and facilitate your questions for our special guest and then we'll wrap up at 3:30 p.m.



I am hosting this town hall because the arts community in Minnesota is important - important to me and important to the success of this state. The cultural, creative, economic, and educational contributions that are made by the people in the room, and many more, make Minnesota a great place to live.

In these difficult economic times and with fiscal challenges in both Washington and St. Paul there are voices that talk about cutting or eliminating arts funding. They call it a luxury or a waste of tax dollars.

Well, I am not interested in wasting your tax dollars ever - not in the arts, not in defense, not in education. We need to keep making smart investments in jobs and economic development, and working for strong, safe, vibrant communities.

And, this is why I strongly support public funding for the arts and arts education in our public schools.

This is why I voted to support \$50 million in the *Recovery Act* for the arts.

This is why I am going to continue to use my seat on the House Appropriations Committee to help put the NEA budget on a funding trajectory that will leverage even more of the economic potential of the arts to create jobs and allow for more arts related economic development to take off here in Minnesota and around the country.

For anyone here today who works in the arts - you have the same basic needs for your business, your organization, and your family as any other citizen. You need access to quality health, to child care, to reliable transportation, and to housing that fits the needs of your life and your work.

Working with President Obama, I am proud that we passed historic health care reform legislation. That's going help people in this audience and all Minnesotans. We are making significant investments in transportation infrastructure here in the Twin Cities with the Central Corridor and the Union Depot. These investments will connect people, businesses, and economic opportunities for the arts, for entrepreneurs, and for our future. These are some of the elements needed to build the creative community we all want wherever we live in Minnesota.

Right here in the 4th Congressional District there are nearly 8,400 people employed in jobs directly related to the arts. In Minnesota that number is 54,000 jobs. This is an important economic sector - a creative sector. These are jobs that help people pay their mortgages and rent, buy groceries, and pay for daycare or college tuition. I want these jobs to stay here and I want more artists and arts related jobs created in Minnesota.

For the critics of public arts funding they need to know that across the United States the non-profit arts sector generates over \$166 billion in economic activity resulting in millions of jobs and nearly \$30 billion of tax revenue to federal, state, and local governments. In Minnesota the arts and culture industry contributes over \$830 million to the state's economy.

Clearly, investing in the arts makes sense economically and it's good public policy.

I think this is why in 2008 so many in this room worked so hard to pass the Legacy Amendment. There is a collective wisdom and commitment when over 1.6 million Minnesotans vote to amend the state constitution to tax themselves and dedicate the revenue to the arts, culture, and environmental future of this state. Minnesota is the only state in the country with a dedicated public funding source for the arts and for that we should all be proud.

One of the true champions of the Legacy Amendment is here today and he deserves credit for this achievement and for his decades of fighting for the arts in Minnesota - State Senator Dick Cohen.

Another project Dick Cohen and I worked on together in 2008 - along with many of you - was electing an arts advocate to the White House. We were also successful with that project.

President Barack Obama cares about the arts, understands how investing in the arts strengthens the economy and community, and believes arts education is critical to the development of our children. President Obama's commitment to the arts was demonstrated with his nomination of Mr. Rocco Landesman to be chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Established by Congress in 1965, the NEA is our nation's largest annual arts funder dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education.

America has a true champion for the arts in Chairman Rocco Landesman. Mr. Landesman comes to Washington from New York having had a successful career - artistically and commercially - operating and owning Broadway theaters. He has a doctorate from Yale in Dramatic Literature and he loves baseball. The *New York Times* called the chairman as "a fast-moving, risk-taking entrepreneur who is colorful and blunt."

I can testify that the chairman is fast moving because he has been traveling the country fully engaged in making sure the creative and economic power of art helps to drive America's economic recovery. As the chairman says, "arts jobs are real jobs" and I for one am want more real jobs created in the arts.

Chairman Landesman has been gracious to come to St. Paul today as part of his "Art Works" tour. This is a theme he'll expand upon today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honored to welcome to Minnesota the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts - Rocco Landesman.